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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000121

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SUBJECT: CZECH DPM VONDRA ON UPCOMING VISIT OF PRESIDENT OBAMA

Classified By: CDA MARY THOMPSON-JONES FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a March 3 meeting which included DFM Tomas Pojar and other key Czech officials, Czech DPM Alexandr Vondra reiterated the Czech government's appreciation for and excitement over the April 4-5 visit to Prague by President Obama. He expressed the Czech government's full commitment to making the visit a success. In discussing Czech views on the agenda, Vondra noted that the bilateral agenda will necessarily have to include a discussion of missile defense, given that this issue has been a key theme of U.S.-Czech relations over the past two years. With regard to the U.S.-EU informal summit, the Czechs envision the centerpiece to be a discussion of climate change and energy security, followed by the broader Middle East including Iran, and other issues that may "spill over" from the G-20 and NATO summits, such as Afghanistan/Pakistan and the economic crisis. Vondra urged close coordination in preparing the Prague agenda, especially with regard to missile defense, which will be of intense interest, both internationally and domestically, and will drive certain decisions concerning the ratification of the U.S.-Czech missile defense agreements in the Czech parliament. END SUMMARY.

MISSILE DEFENSE: NEED FOR "COMMON LANGUAGE"

¶2. (C) In light of the press reports regarding the letter from President Obama to President Medvedev, DPM Vondra kicked off the March 3 meeting by noting the need for close coordination between the United States and the Czech Republic, especially in the period before and during President Obama's visit when the media, both domestic and foreign, will be more focused than ever on missile defense (MD). Vondra urged that the U.S. and Czech governments work to "find common language" on MD and be well prepared for the media onslaught, including the Russians' intentionally generated leaks and headlines. DFM Tomas Pojar added that the Russians will continue to "fine tune the media" through stories like the one in the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, and it would be important to respond. Note: The Czechs were deeply appreciative of President Obama's March 3 statement on MD, following his meeting with PM Gordon Brown. DFM Pojar called EUR Assistant Secretary Fried and NSC Senior Director McFaul to thank them and discuss the matter further. End Note.

¶3. (C) Ever the realist, Vondra noted that the Czech government understands that the policy review underway in Washington that concerns MD would likely not be finished before President Obama's visit in early April. In Vondra's view, there are two options for how to handle MD during the visit: 1) a statement of support, which would indicate that in light of the continuing threat from Iran and other

countries, the United States and its NATO allies would move forward with MD, but at the same time pursue diplomatic dialogue (in Vondra's' words: the "speak softly but carry a big stick" option); or 2) restatement of the current U.S. position. As FM Schwarzenberg told Secretary Clinton in February and as Vondra repeated in the March 3 meeting, the Czechs would definitely prefer the first option, but according to Vondra, they can work with the second as well. Again, Vondra and others from the Czech side stressed that with either option, advance preparation and coordination on the public message will be key. What the Czechs seek to avoid, Vondra emphasized, is being "taken by surprise."

¶4. (C) For the Czechs, this is important not only from the public relations perspective, but also because what will be said about MD during President Obama's visit will be a factor in how the Czechs manage the ratification of the two MD agreements -- the Ballistic Missile Defense Agreement and the Status of Forces Agreement -- which are still pending in the Lower Chamber of the Czech parliament. The MFA's Political Director Martin Povejsil added that MD also remains important in the NATO context and will be an issue for the NATO Summit in Strasbourg. According to Povejsil, the United States and the Czech Republic should work together prior to the Strasbourg Summit to ensure that no ground is lost on NATO's Bucharest MD commitment. Furthermore, the MFA's Security Policy Director Veronika Kuchynova-Smigolova emphasized the Iran and its actions should not become the sole measure of the ballistic missile threat. She noted that the NATO threat analysis focused not only on Iran, but also on other threat sources.

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U.S.-EU SUMMIT: LOOKING FOR "QUALITY" OUTCOME

¶5. (C) Vondra noted that he would be discussing the EU's proposals for the U.S.-EU informal summit agenda on March 4 in Brussels. He expected that energy security and climate change would likely be on the agenda, since they would not be addressed during the G-20 and NATO Summits preceding the Prague event. Povejsil added that they were also considering a discussion of the broader Middle East and Iran, as well as "spill over" issues from London and Strasbourg. For example, while the economic/financial crisis would be addressed at the G-20 Summit, the Czechs realize that this issue would likely be on the agenda for the Prague Summit as well, since not all of the EU-27 will have been at the G-20. Vondra and his team offered few details on how the "informal" summit would be structured, given that there are not many precedents, but Vondra was clear that they would be pressing for a high "quality" outcome, most likely a joint press statement. Vondra quipped that "we should hire a poet," who could truly capture this moment of opportunity when the leaders of the United States and the EU "relaunch the trans-Atlantic relationship."

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The March 3 meeting served as the Embassy's first opportunity to focus on the substance of President Obama's upcoming visit with the key Czech officials who will be driving the agenda on the Czech side. Vondra and his team are clearly focused on maximizing the visit's impact both domestically and within the context of the trans-Atlantic relationship. The rest of the Czech government is moving forward with preparations, and everyone has so far provided us with maximum support. Even President Klaus and PM Topolanek are putting aside their differences and are meeting on March 4 to coordinate on this visit. There will be several opportunities in the next few weeks to work with the Czechs on the agenda, including the March 6 Foreign

Ministerial Troika and especially Vondra's own visit to Washington on March 23. Vondra signaled that developing the "common language" on MD will be one of his chief priorities during his Washington trip. The Czechs are not losing sight of the fact that the bilateral agenda is broader than MD alone. However, as Vondra stated "if we do not address it, the media will ask in the very first question."
Thompson-Jones